

**Ohio University**  
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**Country Profile: Indonesia**

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## **Country Profile**

### **Indonesia**

**By Niken Hardiani**

#### *Geography*

Indonesia is located in the Southeast Asia and it lies between Asia and Australia. It is the largest archipelago country in the world which consists of 17,508 islands. The five largest islands in Indonesia are Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua. The capital city, Jakarta, is in the island of Java. Indonesia has 33 provinces all over the country. The size of the country is 1,919,440 square kilometers (741,050 sq mi). The population has reached 241,973,879 people so that the fact has considered Indonesia the fourth densely inhabited country in the world after the United States of America.

#### *Climate*

Because of its location, which is lying along the equator, Indonesia has a tropical climate, with dry (April – October) and rainy (October – April) seasons. The temperature is between 19° C and 30° C. Average annual rainfall varies from 1,780 – 3,175 millimeters (70 – 125 in), and up to 6,100 millimeters (240 in) in mountainous regions.

## *Flora*

The flora of Indonesia has many tropical plants. Indonesia ranks the second largest biodiversity country in the world after Brazil. It has 28,000 species of flowering plants in Indonesia. It consists of 2,500 different kinds of orchids, 6,000 traditional medicinal plants, 122 species of bamboo, 350 species of rattan, and 400 species of wood.

In addition to that, Indonesia also has a unique flower named *Rafflesia Arnoldi* (Bunga Bangkai). It was named after Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles and Dr. Arnold who discovered the flower. Its unpleasant smell has actually invite bees and pollination flies for the flower. *Rafflesia Arnoldi* is the official flower for Bengkulu Province, one of the provinces in Sumatra.

In the World Environment Day on June 5, 1990, the Indonesian government declared three Indonesia's national flowers. These are the "melati" (a small white flower with sweet fragrance), the "anggrek bulan" (moon orchid), and the *Rafflesia Arnoldi*.

## *Fauna*

The tropical climate has made Indonesia a suitable place for a variety of fauna such as tiger, rhinoceros, orangutan, elephant, leopard, and komodo. In addition to that Indonesia has approximately 600 bird species.

Sumatran Orangutan, a great ape endemic to Indonesia, has critically endangered. This fact has lead Indonesia to build of the largest primate house in the world, The Schmutzer Primate Center. It is located inside the Ragunan Zoo in Jakarta. The Center houses many different primate species amongst which gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans. It aims to contribute to the wild population by sending groups of healthy apes and monkeys back to their natural habitats.

Other endangered fauna in the world, Komodo, can only be found in several islands in Indonesia. This large lizard native to Indonesia can grow to an average length of 2 – 3 meters (6.5 – 10 feet). They are protected under Indonesian law. The government also established the Komodo National Park in order to protect them.

### *Culture*

There are more than 300 ethnic groups with 250 local languages in Indonesia. In spite of the influence of foreign culture, some regions still preserve indigenous way of life. The ethnic group of Mentawai, Asmat, Dani, Dayak, and Toraja are still practicing their ethnic ritual, customs, and traditional clothes.

Indonesia also has traditional practice of communicating ideas and information. Indonesian ancestors used “wayang”, traditional theatre-performed

puppet shows, to spread Hinduism and Islam amongst the Javanese people. Wayang are still performing in many places in Indonesia, especially in Jawa Island, for entertainment purposes. The three famous kinds of wayang are wayang golek, originally from West Java, wayang kulit and wayang orang, mainly performed in Central Java. Indonesian martial art called Pencak Silat is a combination of traditional art, music and sport.

In many modern life styles, Western culture has influenced the local media such as television shows, movies, songs, and dances. Many young generations are now more familiar with English language than ten years ago.

### *Religion*

There are six religions recognized by the Indonesia government, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The ratio of the religions are Islam 85.2%, Protestant 8.9%, Roman Catholic 3%, Hindu 1.8%, Buddha 0,8% and other 8%. Most of the Hindus live in Bali Island and it has apparently become one of the tourism values.

Although Indonesia has many religions and different kinds of life value, the people live in harmony. People can easily tolerate each others' religion well.

## *Tourism*

There are many attractive and wonderful places in Indonesia. One of the famous tourism objects in the world is the island of Bali. It has beautiful white sand beaches with blue sky imageries and traditional arts that have become one of the tourism destinations for international tourists from all over the world for many years.

Other interesting place that must be visited is one of the seven wonders in the ancient world, Borobudur Temple, which is located near Magelang, Central Java. Borobudur is the largest Hindu-Buddhist temple in the world which was built in 9<sup>th</sup> century. It was found in 1815 under volcanic ash. The temple was constructed on a hill and is about 46 meters high. Symbolizing the structure of the universe, Borobudur Temple is definitely offers spectacular sight in the modern world.

## *Food*

This archipelago country has known for its spices since many years ago. Most of Indonesian people eat rice as the main dish with vegetables and meat as side dishes. Indonesian dishes are usually spicy using chilies and spices. The most popular food includes nasi goreng, sate, soy-based dishes called tofu and tempe, and gado-gado (Indonesian style salad).

At present Indonesian food is also influenced by Western culture. There are many fast food companies found all over the main cities. However, most of Indonesian families serve traditional food with various roots, spices, grasses, and leaves to flavour the dishes. Indonesians usually eat rice twice a day, at lunch and dinner. An Indonesian meal will often accompanied by several additional foods at the table, including sambal (chilies) and kecap (soybeans ketchup).

Since there are a great number of kinds of food in Indonesia, Indonesia has recently added culinary tourism as one of interesting elements either for domestic and international tourists. Every region in Indonesia has its own traditional food. For example Jogjakarta has “gudeg”, Padang has “rendang”, Bandung has “batagor”, Semarang has “lumpia” and many others.

### *Music and Dance*

The traditional music instrument, which is known as gamelan, has become a national identity. It is frequently performed in Central Java, East Java, and Bali.

A popular type of song among Indonesian people is Dangdut. This kind of music has an Indian-rhythmical which is often mixed with Arab and Malay folk music. Other kind of music is Keroncong which is a musical genre that uses guitars and ukulele as the main musical instruments. In West Java, popular

musical performances are Degung, which is similar with gamelan, and Angklung, series of musical instrument made of bamboo.

The variety of ethnic groups produces different kind of dances. Indonesia has Kecak Dance from Bali, Jaipong from West Java, Plate Dance from West Sumatra, Saman Dance from Aceh and many others. The Kecak Dance is one of the most famous dances in Bali because of its uniqueness. It has no musical instrument like other dances in Indonesia. The rhythm of the dance is produced by the chanting of monkey chorus.

### *Dress*

Every province in Indonesia has their traditional dress. At the moment many Indonesians do not wear the traditional dress anymore and they were usually worn in certain occasion. Indonesia is also the home for traditional motif called batik. It is a beautiful hand-painted pattern which carries significance that symbolizes life itself. Different regions in Java have their own unique style; Pekalongan with its Chinese influence design; Solo and Yogyakarta with traditionally colored blue (symbolizing earth), brown (symbolizing fire), and white (symbolizing water and air).

The traditional cloth for men is “sarung” (sarong). It is a round long skirt with colorful squares motif. They usually wear sarong in informal occasion. The

women also have traditional clothes called “kebaya”. It is the combination between traditional dress and batik. Nowadays, all the traditional dresses are wearing in the formal events to celebrate certain days. However, in several regions, these clothes are still commonly worn.

### *Customs*

Indonesians are very friendly and loving people. Traditional value had inherited most of the Indonesian the respect for one another. Many Indonesians are originally involved in the agricultural sectors, while others are fishermen and hunters. The way of life has been influence by religions. Indonesian Moslems celebrate Ramadhan and Eids; Christians have Christmas; Hindus have Galungan, and Waisak Day for the Buddhists.

Because the majority of Indonesian people are Moslems, they do not eat pork and drink alcohol. People will consume food or drink which have “halal” label on the wrapping. The labels were given by the authority through specialized government department.

### *Children*

Indonesian children are happy and cheerful kids. They usually enter the elementary school at the age of 7 and continue the grammar school up to the age

of 12. Afterward, they enter the secondary school, which is consists of Junior High School and High School for three years each.

After the school is over, the children come home and do their homework. They also like to play soccer and some other traditional games such as kasti (similar with baseball), hide and seek, and rubber jump.

The children, who live in big cities, like to watch cartoons movies. They usually love Japanese cartoon characters such as Doraemon, Pokemon, Digimon, Detective Conan. They also play electronic toys such as Play Station and Nintendo.

In several places, the children also help the parents to work to add financial support. Many of them are helping their parents working in the farm and in the home industries.

### *History*

Austronesian people, who migrated to South East Asia from Taiwan, arrived in Indonesia around 2000 BCE and confined the native Melanesian people to the eastern regions, including Indonesia. Indonesia's strategic position attracted many Indian kingdoms and China to have trade links. The first European arrived in Indonesia in 1512 from Portugal followed by Dutch and

British trader. Indonesia had become the Dutch nationalized colony since 1602 until the Japanese invasion until the World War II.

In 1945, Sukarno, an influential nationalist leader, declared Indonesian independence and was appointed president. The second president, General Suharto, was appointed in March 1968 and encouraged foreign investment in Indonesia. It was a major factor for substantial economic growth.

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